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Theoretical Contributions of Peripheral Feminism and Queer Theory to Intercultural Education

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Abstract

In this essay we attempt to describe the contributions that peripheral feminism and queer theory can make in education to prevent or at least mitigate the exclusion of women, both native as well as those belonging to Spanish social minority groups. We understand that intercultural education is that which provides the means for the voices of said invisible groups to be heard, this requires to relativize realities, especially that of the host society.

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1. Introduction

The school is, or should be, a privileged place to make changes in a given society, an environment in which learning and unlearning occur simultaneously and as a result of our collective diversity. However, the structure of educational institutions becomes like factories that homogenize boys and girls where any dissent whatsoever is repressed and punished.

The curriculum, comprised both of aspects which have been established by law and also—perhaps even more so—of hidden particulars, often generates practices that exclude an important subsection of students, disregarding their diversity and their personal identities. Anyone who falls outside of the heteronormative pattern in Spanish society (and

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the Western world in general)—that which is not white, male, heterosexual, upper middle class, Jewish or Christian, without any kind of disability or functional diversity—is likely to be invisible.

If racism outbreaks occur in our society, LGTB phobia and gender violence also occur in schools, the latter are microcosms that reproduce social structures (instead of promoting change). As the famous African American feminist Angela Davis asserts in her 1981 book, "Women, Race and Class", factors such as social class, ethnicity and gender have joined others such as religion, functional diversity and sexuality as instruments of social denunciation. Also, public policies carried out across the whole of Europe (Reuters, 2011; Drafting WebIslam, 2009; Teruel, 2010), all with clear xenophobic tones, are just the tip of the iceberg. Spain is no exception; with multiple attempts to regulate the veil in public spaces (ABC, 2010; Intereconomía, 2011; Mundodigital.com, 2011; Mumbrú, 2010, 20 minutes, 2010).

2. But how does this affect the educational field?

In education, forms of discrimination tend to be subtler, especially when it comes to issues regarding racism targeted towards (or against) specific groups like gypsies or students from Muslim countries. This is evident, in many cases, by "politically correct" speeches, which tend to focus on two main themes: gender, and the incompatibility of coexistence with minority cultures that exist today in our society. The theme of cultural incompatibility has intensified in recent years, particularly since 11-S, according to harangues of authors like Samuel Huntington who, in his famous 1997 speech, "clash of civilizations", proclaimed that the uncompromising defense of the West was being "besieged from the outside and inside with terror and even the ideas and ways of life of immigrants ... [whose] cultures or civilizations [...] are defined by a religious, racial and cultural homogeneity well defined" (Monge, 2009, p.106) that threatens Western moral integrity.

In the case of Muslim and Gypsy groups the prevailing hostility, despite centuries of living together, is based (as the Colectivo IOE (2007) explains) on two elements: first, on the lifestyles of the "too free" or "too independent" Gypsies, who do not obey established laws and on the lifestyles of Muslims, who have long been regarded as immigrants who identify with a distant and therefore counter-culture; second, on a more rigorous patriarchal and sexist majority culture—the "I" to counteract their "Other"—a product of a backward culture that is common to both groups' cultures.

It is the latter element that most interests us here. It is this dialectic which allows us to highlight the complicated interrelationships between discrimination based on culture (tired are the arguments based on race (Stolcke, 1994)) and discrimination based on gender, both of which lead to the treatment of gipsy and Muslim women as scapegoats of the "macho" and "backward culture", to which they belong. It furthermore helps to explain the pitying or patronizing treatment often given to children belonging to these groups, attributing to them an eternal image of submissiveness as well as an inherent incapacity to think for themselves or take control of their own lives. Thus, they face a double guilt: belonging to a "more macho" and also be "submissive" culture, a submission that seems to be at odds with our newly acquired Western freedom, but in serious danger now with the latest policy measures by the Spanish government.

In the case of gipsy girls, they are not paid attention at school, as it is considered that soon after their studies begin, their family and their group shall bring them out of school to marry them; the Muslim case, "the use [...] of the veil covering their heads [...] is interpreted as a sign of encapsulation, marking and relegation of women in social life, in which unquestionably the male figure is the predominant one." (Colectivo IOE, 2007, p.55). But it is not only that, these women are permanently considered immigrants as if it was an inherited element, even though many of them were born here, or belong to converse Spanish families or once they are studying Secondary Education in Spain. In both cases, the consideration of their cultures as static is not a big help.

The main issue is that if we consider our own students as submissive, passive objects of life, it is a very complicated process of change to be generated in their own lives, especially in their own contexts. Here lies the importance of peripheral feminism such as the Islamic feminism, gypsy feminism, black feminism, or queer theory, to know our own students and be aware of that culture, far from being static, it's like the own identity, something that it is built during life, in which many elements interact, as noted at the beginning.

Controversial elements like the veil, female genital mutilation, early marriage ... generate intense debates that put into question this multiculturalism in society. However, this is usually analyzed from a Western perspective camouflaged under the guise of human rights -which are constantly violated-, and speeches towards gender equality

and even feminism, not applied to their own environments, this mainly involves the criminalization of those groups, specially women. This idea is what allows us to visualize a new kind of racism based on gender, gender racism, particularly evident in the case of Islamophobia (Islamophobia gender).

In education, the most visible aspect which unleashes heated arguments cyclically, coincidentally coinciding with election periods, is the topic of the veil: it has not only been in many cases an excuse to change regulations in schools, but also to expel the younger ones, putting their right to education aside, even citing reasons such as gender equality (for a more detailed discussion, see Salas, 2013).

From an anthropological perspective, the important thing in any of the three cases as well as others, is not to agree, disagree or support the various practices, but to turn cultural relativism as a tool "to understand the reasons the other, and incidentally, to expose our prejudices and stereotypes" (Monge, 2009, p.107). This is not moral relativism, but a constant negotiation in which, while we question the "others" we rethink our own "veils", our own impositions, and even our own process of constructing our identity processes that begin in childhood, influenced by the environment and the expectations that people and institutions put on us, but especially on us (women). And this can only be done based on the recognition of the "others" as active subjects of their life, equal to us with a unique and personal history as complex as any of us, women to learn from and not liable to be given lessons of superiority or to be saved, because they do not need to be redeemed.

3. Peripheral Feminisms and Queer Theory

If anything characterizes feminism are to evidence the different social mechanisms of oppression that besiege women. However, feminism is not a single element but it is adapted to each context, every social reality, although the Western bourgeois feminism has not wanted to realize about this until recently. Thus, the so called peripheral feminisms which have a postcolonial character, have been put on the table a number of issues not taken into consideration by this hegemonic feminism.

To begin with, the very conceptualization of "woman", characteristic of Western construct female-male dichotomy, with different features and qualities, did not represent all the variability of forms of "being a woman", as there is not a single female identity, so we should talk about "women". Similarly, the construction of the "others" is based on the contrasting model of "woman" prevalent in Western society attributes, it did not comply with reality: it represents women from the 'third world' as ignorant, poor, traditional, victims, family oriented and therefore sexually restricted, except for black women, possessing uncontrolled sexuality. In the words of Fatima Mernissi (2001) it was built "Arab women as subservient and obedient slaves, unable to realize or develop their own revolutionary ideas that do not follow the dictates of the most liberated women in the world", this being equally applicable to blacks, gypsies, mestizos, indigenous ... they all capable of being rescued.

They all complain of being invisible in the racial discourse (dominated by black men, Muslims, Gypsies...), the gender (in which the discourse is white) and class (which seems not to understand of race or gender), as well expressed in the title of the book of Gloria T Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (1982) "All the Women are White, All the Men are Black but Some of us are Brave: Black Women's Studies." At the same time they defend their own specificities to be recognized when recognized as active subjects. The same kinds of slogans are defended by the gypsy feminism, which claim their role as processors of context; from equality that takes into account the difference (Lopez, 2007).

On the other hand, the concept of gender has also created controversy. Both the queer theory and the African black feminism blow up the supposed stability and universality of this Western socio-cultural construction. Queer theory critically reviews the concept of nomadic identities to speak against those fixed and based on the binary sex-gender (Butler, 2002) system, which is well reflected in the case of African black feminism, where the Nigerian Oyeronke Oyewumi (2010) relates this construct as intrinsic to the Western nuclear family model, whose structure is not universal, and does not respond to the specificities of African women. In this regard it is interesting the recognition of transsexuals in India as a third gender (Reuters, 2014).

As Muslim women are concerned, they make a feminist or gender reading of the sacred scriptures, the Koran in this case, from the perspective of respect for Human Rights. The key element to them, and that is what seems to oppose frontally supposedly secular Western white feminism, is the religious or spiritual faith, especially when the vision we

have of Islam is so close that it is considered that feminism and Islam are incompatible terms. However, in processes of migration and diaspora, besides the everyday racism, Muslim women are denied the opportunity to be recognized as Muslims in everyday life and their religion is criminalized and the defense of their religion through symbols such as the veil is a symbol of resistance. More detailed analysis on this, both in France and in Spain, can be found at: Andújar, 2007; Delphy, 2010; Salas, 2012, 2013. In the Spanish case, it seems that the fact of willing to go covered is a challenge for cultivated feminists, who identify the "pop" of the end of the dictatorship as a sign of progress and sexual liberation. This may be one of the reasons why in the educational context there are not so many problems with Black and Latina girls due to their dress.

As Beatriz Preciado explains (2007) "The aim of these feminist projects [...] would be [...] to dismantle political attempts that produce differences in class, race, gender and sexuality and feminism making an artistic and political platform invention of a common future". As "they are fights not based on natural identity struggles, even sexual, or belonging to a nation, but are otherwise a cross of critical minorities. The ethical dimension is not differentiated of politics." (Preciado, B., in Silvestri, 2010).

4. Conclusions

All these cases show that the personal identity of our students (boys and girls) is not taken into account, trying as far as possible to assimilate it to heteronormative patterns that are marked from above. In this case, since adult society does not pay attention to the demands of children and youth manifest, including limiting, if not criminalizing adult examples in which these children, male and female, can be represented. In the case of the gypsy collective, perpetuating the image of men as lazy and criminals; Muslims as machos who enslave their women; in the case of Latinos machos too, who spend the day looking for a "brawl". In all cases, the idea of women as submissive and passive subjects when not guilty of sexual assault suffering, in the case of blacks and Latinos is present.

It is very difficult to see depictions of marginal women as successful, educated, leading change processes and handling charge of their life freely and autonomously, or women who break the mold taking into account their ethnicity, sexuality, and religion relate, because all these elements intersect a thousand times in their own being.

Perhaps this is more evident in cases of sexual diversity, as it has been observed in Andalucía (Spain) with centers which do not accept sexual identity and / or gender of children and transgender girls, or multiple complaints about bullying LGBTQ phobia that have led many young people to even consider suicide. Indeed, the case of the Russian law prohibiting homosexual advertising, sanctioning "information" nontraditional sex aimed at children "(Bonet, 2013), which is in reality, means to minimize the images of other relationships between people, other ways of living sexuality, and desire, so that students do not find references to identify with and think that their way of being is not adequate and there is a "problem" that must be remedied.

The result is that there is a lack of interest in showing that other models of personhood exist because if not, who would save the progressive, developed and civilized Western world? Thus, every excuse to invade other countries and nations would end.

For this reason, it is essential to conduct from schools "a process of deconstruction of the social and ideological practices of racial, cultural and linguistic exclusion present in the educational, economic and political institutions" of our country (Guitart and Bastiani, 2010, p.3). It involves going beyond what the theory poses on intercultural education, because the reality is that their application is not working. To promote, de facto, an anti-racist pedagogy that "empowers people to dismantle the speeches, practices and structures that reproduce racism" (Torres, 1997, p.32), and other forms of discrimination and oppression, and to be supported to achieve it, by the contributions of different feminisms and power to visualize subtle processes of discrimination.

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